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ABSTRACT

This is the first of two volumes of papers examining the impact of national agricultural policy on the rural poor. The seven articles in this volume offer personal accounts of minority and low-income farmers struggling to gain a foothold in American agriculture. "'It's Too Late for Our Family,'" by Marian Lenzen, describes a family's struggle to hold onto its small Nebraska farm and the probable fate of that farm. "Death of a Farm?" by Judy Dye, describes an organic farmer's frustrations in making loan agreements with the Farmer's Home Administration. "Vanishing Act: America's Black-Owned Farmland," by Billie Jean Young, demographically describes declining land ownership by Blacks since the turn of the century. It also examines the trend's effect on Black political activism, economic power, and migration patterns. "Naheola, Alabama: A Remembrance of a Black Farming Community," also by Young, describes a young woman's upbringing in a Black farming town during the 1950s and the disappearance of that town's farming base. "A Poor Harvest: Some Thoughts on Native American Agriculture," by David A. Larsen, describes the effects of U.S. agricultural policy on American Indian land-ownership patterns. In "We Can't Buy Any Land: Farmworkers Plant Cooperative Seeds," Jessie de la Cruz describes her efforts to start a small farm in a federal irrigation district where most of the acreage is controlled by wealthy landowners. In "Last and Still Least," Alice Larsond discusses the economic and social dilemmas of U.S. migrants and seasonal farmworkers. (TES)

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Perspectives on the Structure of American Agriculture

VOLUME I: THE VIEW FROM THE FARM

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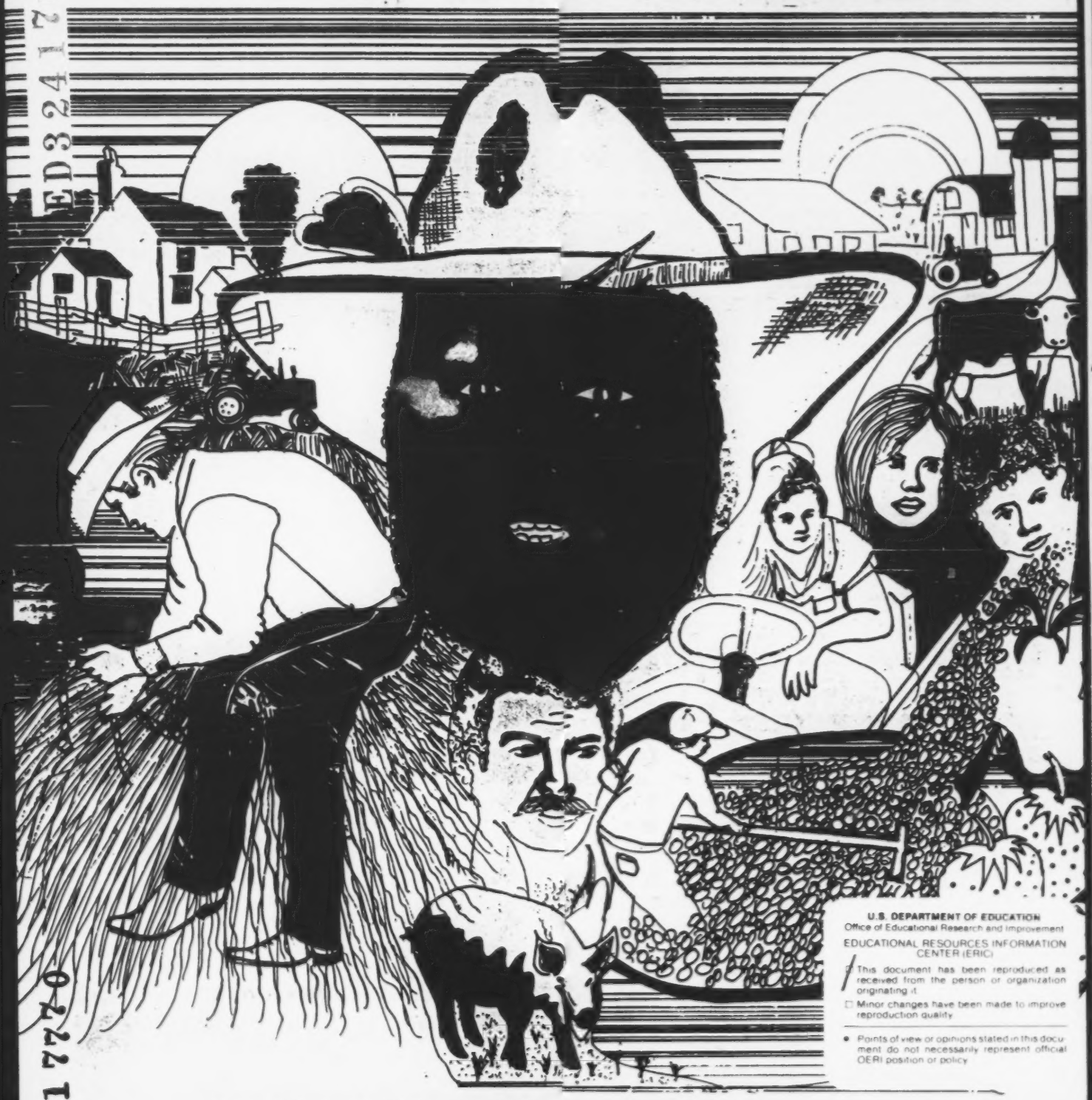

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Perspectives on the Structure of American Agriculture

Volume I: The View from the Farm—
Special Problems of Minority and Low-Income Farmers

Kenneth M. Coughlin, editor

Prepared by Rural America with a grant from the Community Services Administration, as part of a U.S. Department of Agriculture inquiry into the "Structure of American Agriculture."

Spring, 1980

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Even in the case of modest efforts such as this one, there are many to be thanked.

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Finally, there are the authors themselves, both those whose papers are collected here and those whose papers, for one reason or another, could not be included. Their cheerful willingness to contribute their time and expertise for small remuneration made everything else possible.

Peggy Borgers
Project Director

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Introduction

In March of 1979, Bob Bergland, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, called for a "national dialogue" on the structure of American agriculture. Pointing to changes in farming—especially the trend toward concentration as the number of farms dwindles and their average size increases—Bergland raised some pivotal questions about the desirability of these changes and the role of public policy in bringing them about:

"Are those policies and programs . . . creating, or helping to create, something we *don't* want in American agriculture?"

"Are they in whole or in part responsible for an unending trend toward larger and larger and fewer and fewer farms that will increasingly dominate and control production?"

"Do they tend to help *most* those farmers who need help the least? And help *least* those farmers who need help the *most?*"

Bergland did not claim to have the answers. Instead, he launched a unique government/public inquiry that included ten regional public hearings to help clarify the issues and serve as a basis for upcoming revisions of farm programs, notably the 1981 farm bill.

The Community Services Administration (CSA) recognized both the importance of the national dialogue and the likelihood that low-income farmers would not be heard from without a special effort to guarantee their participation. Therefore, in keeping with its mandate to serve as an advocate for low-income people in those areas of federal policy that affect them, CSA asked Rural America, a non-profit group based in Washington, D.C., to ensure that the voices and viewpoints of the poor would not go unheeded.

With a small grant from CSA, the Rural Land Alliance of Rural America began attacking the problem from two directions. First, it encouraged low-income people to get involved in the ten regional hearings—collecting names of those willing to testify, helping them draft testimony and making sure they got on the program. Second, Rural America commissioned a series of background papers on various dimensions of agricultural policy and how they affect both low-income farmers and the rural poor.

These papers have since been collected, edited and published in two booklets under the general heading, "Perspectives on the Structure of American Agriculture." Taken together, the two volumes serve as a good introduction to the impact of national agricultural policy on the poor.

Volume I approaches the issue from a descriptive standpoint, while Volume II is more analytical. Entitled *The View from the Farm*, the first booklet deals with the special problems of minority and other low-income farmers, with an emphasis on the personal accounts of many who have struggled—both successfully and unsuccessfully—to gain a foothold in American agriculture. Brought to light are the problems of southern black farmers, who are increasingly becoming an endangered species; native American farmers, who hold title to vast tracts of land but are unable to farm most of it themselves; and Chicano, black and white farmworkers, who till the land for the profit of others. Among the personal accounts is the harrowing tale of a small organic farmer who was forced to fight for federal assistance because of his "unconventional" approach; the compelling remembrance of a black sharecropper's daughter whose family was finally thrown off the land; an explanation by a Nebraskan of why her family cannot remain in farming; and the thoughts of a former farmworker who organized a farm production cooperative in California, only to be denied access to federally-subsidized irrigation water.

In the second volume, *Federal Farm Policies*, experts in various fields analyze, from the standpoint of the low-income farmer, the federal agricultural programs alluded to in the first booklet. One paper, for instance, examines the effects on small farmers of agricultural price supports. Another questions the role of federal agricultural research. Alternative energy development for farmers,

marketing and sources of farm credit are also scrutinized. One paper is actually a brochure that explains how a new, low-income farm loan program works. The encroachment of corporations is treated in a chapter on vertical integration in the food system. And, finally, one paper shows how changes in the structure of agriculture have affected non-farm rural residents.

Still, the collection of papers is by no means complete; time prevented the inclusion of chapters on several important topics. Among the most glaring omissions are the issues of taxes, water policy, land, extension programs, women in agriculture and cooperatives. The decision to publish the finished papers in two separate volumes was, in part, based on a desire to underscore the gaps in the collection and to allow for the possibility of future volumes.

But given this, we believe the papers collected here can be a vital tool both for low-income advocates who are unfamiliar with agricultural policies and programs as well as for those who work with farm programs but do not know the impact these programs have on the less well-to-do. We are particularly proud of the personal papers of Volume I that bring to life points made in other papers. These are the voices of those directly affected (or neglected) by agricultural policy; these are the people to whom we should listen.

Peggy Borgers
Rural America
April, 1980

"It's Too Late For Our Family"

from testimony at a hearing on the Structure of American Agriculture, Omaha, Nebraska, December, 1979.

Marian Lenzen

My husband and I and our 16 year old daughter live on an 880 acre wheat and cattle farm in southwest Nebraska. My husband has been a farmer all his life. His mother died when he was two, so his father took him along to the field, because hired girls were not always available or dependable. At age four he was herding cows along the country roads so they could eat the weeds and grass that grew in the ditches.

My husband's father came to this area with his German immigrant parents when he was 3 months old. His parents homesteaded and later, when he was a young man, he took up a homestead in his own right. Today he is 94 and still active. He is tied to the land by an inner force that only death will break. He has only one fear: that the land he loves and worked so hard to secure will not remain the property of his sons. He is afraid they will have to sell the land to pay the inheritance taxes.

That won't happen. His sons have roots in the land too. They have worked the soil all their lives. They love it, respect it and nurture it. They will keep the land. They may have to take jobs off the farm to do it, but whatever the cost, they will keep the land.

The changes will come when the next generation inherits the land. We have seven children—four sons and three daughters. Our farm is barely large enough to support one family. We knew, simply by observation and common sense, that farming was not in the future for our children. So we never let them farm. Our children never plowed a field, milked a cow, fed a calf, slopped a hog or raised chickens. Instead, we encouraged them to study hard, play baseball, swim, read, hold part-time jobs while in high school and develop an interest in anything and everything other than farming. We realized it would be cheaper to give all seven children four years of college than it would be to establish one child in farming. Six have now graduated from the University of Nebraska. The seventh will soon follow. It is easier to become a doctor than it is to become a farmer.

Hopefully, a federal farm policy that enables young people to go into farming will result from the hearings held around the country by Secretary Bob Bergland. Such a policy is needed, but it comes too late for our family.

When my husband retires, our farm will be rented out. When we both are dead, there is a good chance that the land, which has been cherished for 125 years by the Lenzen family, will pass into the hands of someone primarily interested in the fast buck,

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Marian Lenzen and her husband have worked their farm, located outside of Sidney, Nebraska, for the past 33 years. Ms. Lenzen is also one of the founders and was the first national spokeswoman for Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE).

hands that think of the earth as dirt. It is too late to change this particular scenario but perhaps if the federal government does look objectively at the situation now and makes some fundamental changes in attitude and policy, it will not to be too late for other families who have children who want to be farmers.

Death of a Farm?

A Nebraska family's experiences with a 'limited resource' loan from the Farmers Home Administration

Judy Dye

My name is Judy Dye, but the story I want to tell is about my husband, Dick, as well. In 1977, when this story begins, we farmed 440 acres of glacial deposit land in the rolling hills of northeast Nebraska. Dick had farmed this land since he was 17; he is now 43. We were married 15 years ago and we have three children — ages 10, 7 and 3. The land we farm is rented from Dick's dad who has owned it since the 1940s and is leaving 160 acres of it to us upon his death. We are buying another 40 acres.

For the first fifteen years Dick farmed conventionally—using chemicals, growing row crops and raising cows, sheep and hogs. If I were to use one word to describe my husband, it would be 'tenacious'; some might say 'stubborn'. It is a characteristic born of working the land and dealing with fickle weather, fluctuating prices, loans coming due and government policies. If I were to use two words to describe him, the other would be 'conservationist'. A man who plants 150 walnut trees doesn't expect to gain the benefit of them for himself. He's investing in the future. This is Dick Dye.

It would be naive of me to believe that tenacity is enough to keep people in farming. Economics is the bottom line. But it is unfortunate that the term 'limited resource' is applied to people like my husband. Small farmers are often the most resourceful farmers because of their smallness. Dick, for example, has developed a genius for creating and repairing machinery for the farm. He has developed marketing skills that he first used to sell hay, then organic produce. He has developed a wildlife sanctuary filled with berry bushes and cover. The wildlife thrive on an organic farm and assist in pest control.

This idyllic picture ended in a painful confrontation with economic reality beginning in 1977. For seven years, Dick had been raising hay and marketing it in Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota and Nebraska. There was a time when as many as three full-time men were working for him. For a time, the hay market was booming. Then set-aside acres returned, costs rose, farmers began planting more of their own hay and the bottom fell out of the market. Eventually, each load of hay going out of the yard was losing money and by the end of 1977 we were $30,000 in debt.

Our local banker and land lending institution suggested we seek financing from the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA). An emergency loan at 3 percent interest was suggested. This sounded encouraging, so they placed the call for us and we applied.

It was at this time that we also decided on a new direction for the farm. We had become increasingly interested in the viability of organic farming—specifically, farming for human consumption. We visited successful farms in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and Kansas. Our main concern was marketing, and we spent the year finding and developing a market. Dick, meanwhile, had

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In addition to being a farm wife, Judy Dye teaches remedial mathematics in Pender, Nebraska. She is also a board member of the Goldenrod Hills Community Action Agency, and a member of the Nebraska Organic Agricultural Association.

discovered that he could make organic oatmeal on the farm and that the demand was enough to encourage him to refine his method.

In the late spring of 1978, FmHA's assistant county supervisor, later the county supervisor, made his first visit to the farm. He was not hesitant to point out that our machinery was not new and that we had no livestock. When we shared our oatmeal with him, he claimed he had tried some before and it made good hog feed. When we handed him a detailed farm program that included organic farming and processing, the plan was set aside and ignored.

We soon discovered that we were too late for the emergency loan at 3 percent that we were hoping for but found we were eligible for a regular operational loan at 8 percent interest. The Farm Plan of 1978,* according to which the FmHA funds were allocated, was standard by all traditional measures. Unfortunately, as the assistant supervisor had learned, we were not traditional. The loans are set up with funds allocated for specific areas; hired labor, fuel, fertilizer, rent, and other expenses. Our plan, however, allowed no money for hired labor. We were raising soybeans and hay and both take a lot of labor. Soybeans must be walked (weeded) by hand and haymaking takes more than one person. Money was permitted for machine hire, but we wanted to purchase our own combine. The Farm Plan also allowed several thousand dollars for chemicals that we did not need. All of these requirements would have (and perhaps do) work for a traditional farmer, but for us they spelled disaster.

While Dick and I could do most of the labor, when it came time to do haying and weed the soybeans, we needed help. Nonetheless, no money was made available to us for this, even after our request to change categories. Consequently, some beans went unweeded and some hay was damaged by rain. Dick had wanted to buy a $3,000 combine and repair it so that we could combine in the peak of the harvest season. Our request was denied, but FmHA did let us spend our borrowed money on machine hire for the year. The final bill was $4500. In other words, what FmHA saved us put us $1500 deeper into debt. To complicate matters, the machine we had hired at oat harvest was suddenly not available at soybean harvest. Trying to find a machine in the middle of the harvest was impossible. Finally, Dick found one he could rent if he repaired it himself. Meanwhile, the beans that did grow dropped on the ground. A tremendous crop loss could have been avoided by FmHA's acknowledging that we were not traditional farmers.

Now we began to orient to the farm not as a family unit but as an economic unit. To make ends meet, one of us had to find an off-farm job. I was the most likely because I could teach school if I took some courses during the summer to upgrade my certificate. This I did, but in doing so I was no longer able to help on the farm. My leaving the farm in the summer meant not only less labor but more expenses for the classes, for child care, for meal preparation. We bartered and took out small loans since all other money was tied up with FmHA. And for the first, and hopefully the only, time, we applied for food stamps. We received these until the fall when I started teaching.

The fall of 1978 was not the turnabout we had worked for and expected. Our anticipated loan did not come until August, well past planting time. Our local bank was guaranteed by FmHA that the bank's loan would be repaid when the federal loan came through. The bank, however, did not lend the necessary funds at planting time so we planted less seed, made fewer trips across the field and reaped a smaller harvest. With a light oat crop and a small bean crop, we were unable to meet our loan payment at 8 percent. We subsequently reapplied to FmHA for a limited resource land and operating loan. We also bought some of Dick's dad's land which he had shown an interest in selling due to increased property taxes and his age. Organic land is hard to come by, since in most states it takes from three to five years of planting with no chemicals, pesticides or herbicides before the production can be certified organic.

Before going on with the story of our 1979 loan, I should mention another problem that besets small farmers. Many farmers purchase needed equipment at farm sales. This takes cash. However, all funds a farmer receives from FmHA go into a special account, and a check drawn on this account must be countersigned by the FmHA office. The items to be purchased with the money fall under categories listed in the Farm Plan. No cash is available. This countersigning policy, we later learned, is applied by each county supervisor at his discretion. The

*FmHA's Farm Plan is an agreement between the agency and the borrower outlining what kinds of farm activities the loan money can be spent on.

policy is understandable; FmHA must account for its loans. But we also learned that not every county supervisor uses this method, including the FmHA state director.

The countersigned check, as it was explained to us, had to be taken to the county supervisor's office, a roundtrip of 40 miles, before it could be presented to the creditor. We found some companies that did not want to deal with countersigned checks—too much paper work—and we could no longer do business with them. Others, when they found out we were on FmHA, did not want us as customers anymore and cut off our credit. Other bills went unpaid from the previous year because they were not part of the Farm Plan. That credit was also stopped. By the end of the first year of our FmHA loan, our credit rating was shot. Establishments with which we had done business for 20 years closed their doors to us, with regrets. When we mentioned this problem to our county supervisor, he said "buy from someone else."

In the fall of 1978, we met with FmHA's county committee. We did this for two reasons: to familiarize them with organic farming and to relate some of the problems we had encountered with our loan in hopes that something could be done for the next year.

The board accepted our operating loan application but denied our application for a land loan. The limited resource loan process provides for an appeal but when we appealed, a series of unpleasant conversations began, culminating in a call from our lawyer, who was working for Legal Aid. He told us he had been talking with the lawyer representing FmHA and was informed that if we continued our appeal, our operating loan would be delayed until the appeal was settled. Furthermore, if we still persisted in the appeal, the FmHA lawyer noted that they need only point out our default on the 1978 loan payment.Frustrated because it was mid-April and the crops needed to be planted, we dropped the appeal. We wanted to farm, and they held all the aces. We were determined to follow every regulation to the letter and work hard to get out from under our FmHA debt. But FmHA's dehumanizing tactics were beginning to make us bitter.

Although FmHA never admits to making a mistake, this second loan (the 'limited resource' operating loan at 5 percent interest) included money for a combine, money for hired labor and some discretionary funds to use for items not needing countersigned checks. The crop went in in the spring of 1979.

Now mother nature took her turn at us. The soybean seed did not germinate as expected. We waited. Some beans came up, others did not. We replanted 70 acres and then it did not rain for a month. We weeded beans for six months—morning, noon and night—but the crop looked below average. We took heart, however, when the oat and wheat crop yield was better than expected.

I must point out here that our organic Farm Plan was not accepted for the second year in a row. The Farm Plan we had to accept did not allow for crop rotation necessary to organic farming, so again weeds plagued us.

During the time between planting and harvesting, Dick was building his oat hulling and milling facility and developing his organic market, which now reached Sioux City, Lincoln, Iowa City, Denver and Minneapolis. Customers were buying oat berries, oatmeal, wheat berries, ground wheat rye and corn meal. Dick had developed organic oatmeal, in great demand by food coops, but at this time the hulling was being done in South Dakota. Hulling oats for human consumption must be done in a huller that has not been contaminated by additives put into cattle feed. The new Farm Plan did not include funds for improving the processing and milling of organic products so we used family money to buy the precious huller that we felt would put our enterprise on its feet.

In mid-October, we were struggling through our soybeans harvest. Our varieties had thicker stems and, because of the weeds, we were running later than our neighbors. Farm wives know that planting and harvesting are the most stressful times of the year. Everything must keep working. We try to keep outside frustrations to a minimum. We 'go-fer' parts to keep the machines running. We feed men in the field because they won't stop long enough to come in and eat. It was then that the straw, the one that broke the camel's back, came in the form of a letter from our county supervisor.

FmHA, in its infinite wisdom, withdrew the funds remaining in our loan account. They stated that now that harvest was over, we would not be needing any more money from the loan. We had 100 acres of soybeans left in the field, and no loan money for fuel, repairs, oil and running expenses like phone and electricity. All of these were categories in our Farm Plan; all were necessary to complete the harvest.

An emergency call was made to the supervisor to ask for an explanation. We had not received such a

letter the year before and had not expected one this year. In fact, we had curbed our spending in hopes of having some money at harvest time to aid in processing the grain for market. Our frugality was rewarded by their pulling our financial rug out from under us. The county supervisor said he had looked at the crop and had decided that it wasn't worth saving. He added that everyone else was finished harvesting and that if we wanted to continue, we could sell some grain at the local elevator.

For the second time, we were appalled at the supervisor's insensitivity. We had been warned *not* to sell anything unless it was released to his office, so we knew if we sold our oats, he would *not* release the money for harvest but apply it to the loan. The money we had struggled for—the loan we had tried so hard to make work—was now unavailable to us because of a whim. We do not know exactly who made this decision, or why. I only know that the look of despair on my husband's face brought forth tears of unrelieved frustration. The combine was parked. Later, after many appeals, FmHA relented and let us have $400 for gas, but Dick turned this down, reasoning that it would take more than gas to harvest. The combine stayed parked.

I think all this would have destroyed a weaker man, but Dick turned his energies to activities that would make money and pay those bills that FmHA refused to pay.

All of Dick's marketing efforts have been unrecognized by FmHA, and Dick was uncomfortable with the constant feeling that he was somehow conspiring against the FmHA-imposed Farm Plan. The profitability of our farm operation is in the processing of our product. Even if the yield is low, it can be offset by the higher market price. 'Dumping' our grain at the elevator would have given FmHA its money back, but we would lose money and never be able to establish the kind of marketing that makes our operation unique.

Our desire to feed people rather than livestock may be thwarted by FmHA, but it is our hope that our story may assist other limited resource farmers to fight for what they really want in the Farm Plan.

As for us, we will continue to struggle. In 1977, we owed $30,000; after two years with FmHA, we owe nearly $100,000. In 1977, we farmed 440 acres; after two years with FmHA, we are farming 200 acres. In 1977, we didn't know what a bureaucracy FmHA was; now we know.

The real irony of this horror story is that in mid-November, after nearly all was lost, we learned through a call to FmHA headquarters in Washington, D.C. that FmHA has an organic marketing policy that gives organic growers additional time to pay back their loans. We spent all that time trying to explain organic marketing to the county supervisor while all along FmHA in Washington had an organic marketing policy under wraps.

We are grateful for the efforts of two organizations without whose help we could not have managed thus far: The Small Farms Advocacy Project of the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska; and Legal Aid, located in Wayne, Nebraska.

It is to them that this is dedicated.

Soon after this article was written, the Dyes reached an agreement with FmHA concerning the release of the remainder of the family's 1979 farm loan and the distribution of the revenue from their oat processing operation. The Dyes are now applying for a smaller FmHA loan for the coming year, and they report that their processing operation is "going great."

Vanishing Act

America's Black-Owned Farmland

Billie Jean Young

Since the turn of the century, the amount of land owned by blacks has decreased at an increasingly alarming rate. In 1910, blacks in the United States held title to 15 million acres and owned or operated about 890,000 farms. By 1969, total acreage held by black landowners had dropped nine million acres and only 79,000 farms were owned or operated by blacks.[1] Between 1954 and 1969, blacks lost land at a 330,000 acres-per-year pace, and in seven southern states combined the weekly rate of black land loss is now estimated to be 6,000 acres. If this rate of attrition is not stemmed, there will be no black landowners left at the start of the next decade.[2]

Many reasons, both economic and social, have been cited for the decline in black-owned land. Much of the loss has come from ". . . legal trickery, perpetrated by southern white lawyers, land speculators, and county officials taking advantage of unsophisticated rural blacks . . ."[3] Increasing industrialization in the rural South also contributed to land falling out of black hands. (For a comprehensive listing and explanation of the various legal maneuvers associated with the divestiture of black-owned land, see Browne, *Only Six Million Acres* [1975]).

Because an equity base in land is essential to economic development, the political and economic consequences flowing from the loss of land are significant. It has been said that "the denial of an equity base in land ownership has consistently been at the heart of black economic impoverishment and political powerlessness in America."[4]

Without land and the economic leverage that accompanies it, the black community is prevented from expanding into businesses and from reaping the rewards of this kind of participation in the marketplace. And without the economic leverage, blacks have little strength in the political arena. Economic dependence, caused by the scarcity of black businesses and other capital-producing institutions, effectively blocks the black community from making independent political decisions.[5]

Individual activism is also hampered by this phenomenon. Landless blacks are not inclined to assert themselves politically and are less likely to respond to organized community efforts. Conversely, blacks who own land are more inclined to participate in community attempts at change.

Dr. Lester Salamon, in his 1975 evaluation of the New Deal Land Reform experiments of the late 1930's and early 40's, found that twice as many landowning black farmers were active in community affairs and in the civil rights movement of the 1960's than were black tenant farmers. In Holmes county, Mississippi, for instance, it was a delegation of black landowners who reached out in 1963 to civil rights groups for help with voter registration in their community. Furthermore, 98 percent of the landholders interviewed by Salamon were registered to vote, compared with 73 percent of the tenants.[6]

Billie Jean Young has been working on poverty issues in the South for the past thirteen years. She is a former staff member of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, having served there as research associate for program development and as the director of a legal services program for poor blacks with land problems. Ms. Young is now a land specialist with Rural America's Rural Land Alliance. She holds a law degree from Samford University.

Out-migration among young southern blacks has further limited the human and economic resources in the black community. Prior to World War I and during the period immediately preceding and through World War II, many blacks, trying to escape the joblessness, poverty, and racism of the South, migrated to northern cities. As a consequence, the black population of the United States, 77 percent rural in 1900, was by 1950 65 percent urban. Since most of those who left were young adults, the average age of the black landowning population that remained rose, and today the majority of black landowners are more than 55 years of age.[7]

A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report shows that in all nonmetropolitan counties experiencing out-migration, there is a shortage of residents in the 15-45 year age group compared with other rural counties. Moreover, a large portion of the minority population in such counties is composed of young children and the elderly. This is called the dependence ratio, "a crude measure of the relationship between the economically active population and those segments of the population which are economically dependent." Blacks in counties with declining populations are found to have the highest dependence ratio.[8] A largely dependent population of very young and old people can do little to change its economic circumstances.

To be sure, a few blacks sold their land as they began to migrate. However, efforts to wrest land from black control continue up to the present, and elderly landowners are often unaware that their land is in jeopardy until it is too late to save it. John Zippert of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, a rural advocacy group for southern blacks, talks about the problem: "Sometimes poor people walk in here with very sad stories about how their land is about to be taken. We try to help them or refer them to somebody who will, like the Emergency Land Fund (ELF—a Georgia-based group fighting to preserve black-owned land). Most times, however, they need legal help, which is hard to come by. The fact that they own land usually disqualifies them as clients of most legal aid programs." Hank Sanders, a Selma attorney who has handled hundreds of black land problems for ELF, adds: "You help those who can be helped. The stories are sad. I used to stall, not wanting people to lose hope. But many of the problems are so old and the chicanery involved so complete, that you just know nothing can be done. When that's the case, it's more humane to say so at the outset."

The trend toward out-migration among southern blacks now appears to be reversing. Statistics since 1970 indicate that at least as many blacks are returning to the South as are leaving, and although they have not purchased large amounts of land, many are buying homes.

Returning blacks confront a variety of socio-economic problems, but the evidence is that they are keenly aware of them. Of the 276,000 blacks who returned to the South in the four years between 1970-74, more than 65 percent were educated (i.e., with schooling ranging from partial college training to graduate degrees) or skilled, and they returned to enter a profession, politics or business.[9]

Typical of these returnees is 38-year-old M/Sgt. Ivory L. Young, the son of an Alabama tenant farmer who has spent the last half of his life outside his home state. Serving his twentieth year in the U.S. Army, M/Sgt. Young is looking forward to returning to the South with his wife and children upon retirement: "To Alabama? Sure. I'm going back. It's home. No question about it. When I retire from Uncle Sam, that's where I'm headed. Working toward that every day. Farming is another story. It was a good life—while it lasted. If the circumstances had been different, that's probably all I would know. I won't go back to farming, though. The system killed my old man and he didn't reap nothing for it. I want to die in peace."

But by and large, the southern economy is not lucrative for low-income, uneducated and unskilled blacks. Denied the option of returning home, they remain locked in northern cities.

Blacks who do own land find it increasingly difficult to farm it. Lack of capital or access to credit continues to be a serious problem for those wishing to continue farming or to purchase land. The high cost of operating even a small farm has made it difficult for those farmers left on the land to continue. And with the escalation in rural land values over the past two decades, particularly during the 1970's, these older farmers are unable to expand their farming operations. Local lending agencies are largely unresponsive to their needs, and the federal programs intended to benefit them fall short; inflexible rules and regulations, which often demand proof of past successful farm operations and large acreages, also contribute to the problem. A case in point is a group of small farmers in Missouri who tried to use the Farmers Home Administration's Limited Resource Farmer loan program to add livestock to their farm operations. The average total

acreage of the fifteen farmers who applied was five acres. The average age of the farmers was 50, and for most of them, farming had been a lifetime occupation. All were initially denied loans on the basis of their lack of commercial experience and on the size of their operations.

Recommendations

The government should give more support to community-based organizations and other groups fighting to preserve black-owned land. Rapid industrialization in the South, the growth of the timber industry and a general economic burgeoning mean that blacks continue to be victimized. Although a number of community organizations have addressed the land question, they have yet to receive substantial help from the federal government.

These groups are saving black-owned land by providing capital for its purchase and offering legal assistance and other advice. But all of them are under-capitalized, and the federal government needs to channel funds through these groups to facilitate this work.

The federal government should also design new programs, both short- and long-range, to help blacks buy and use their land. Because so much land has already been lost, the fight by well-intentioned groups to keep land in the hands of blacks is only part of the battle. That work, while essential, is but the application of a bandaid to a wound that has already spread; direct government aid is also needed. Much land is being grabbed up by outsiders taking advantage of the South's rapid economic development while blacks, once again, are standing helplessly by, unable to participate. Indeed, without adequate capital to run their farms, many blacks who do own land are being forced to sell. Federal programs that provide capital for land purchase and for more low-interest operating loans for farms and other economic enterprises are essential.

Notes

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Naheola, Alabama

A Remembrance of a Black Farming Community

Billie Jean Young

I was born in 1947 in the southwest Alabama town of Pennington, the fifth of seven children born to Oliver and Susie Young. Pennington is located in Choctaw county, in the blackbelt of Alabama. In 1970 the population of Choctaw county was 17,132.

I spent my first nine years on a farm in a community called Naheola, barely a mile outside of Pennington. My father farmed fifty acres there. He rented both the land and the house we lived in from Allison Lumber Company of Bellamy, Alabama. The lumber company owned five or six hundred acres around the Naheola community and in the early part of this century the company allowed blacks to cultivate the land for their own use. In exchange for the equivalent of a bale of cotton a year, my father had free run of the land, and he used it for farming, the raising of livestock and pasturing.

In our community in the 1930's and 1940's several families worked under this arrangement, some farming as many as a hundred acres, depending on the number of children (and therefore, how much labor) they had. Farmers were to take care of the land as if it were their own. During slack times, the black farmers would get together in a community effort to repair broken fences and help with the general upkeep of the land as needed. It was understood that the land was set aside for the use of the farmers to make a living for their families. This was, of course, good from the standpoint of the farmers, considering the relatively low rent, and equally good for the absentee owners, who preferred to have the land in use rather than lying idle. In summer, the stockholders liked to drive down and look the land over, to see the bountiful crops growing and the land well tended and protected. If a farmer was unproductive, with scraggly, untended fields and crops, he would be asked to shape up or leave. Only a few fell into this category, however. Most were interested in making good use of their land; the livelihood of their families was at stake.

Situated as it was near the river, the land was rich and productive. Barely a year went by when the cotton crops did not yield at least a bale per acre, a quantity considered good and adequate, although some years the yield would go as high as two bales. There was fishing and river sports, and hunting and trapping in the woods. The owner and their friends would periodically hold big hunts, barbeques and outdoor festivities at the river. The permanent residents of the community, however, were by and large black farmers, save for a white taxidermist who had a home overlooking the river, and a white family that came later with the expansion of timber farming.

My father was born in 1885. He began farming on the Allison Lumber Company land as a young man, some time before 1910. He brought his first family to the land. His first child, a girl, was born in 1909, and a son shortly thereafter. In the 1930's, he lost his son and his wife, both to undetermined illness. But he continued to farm. The daughter was sent away to a boarding school in nearby Thomaston to complete high school. Having finished only second or third grade himself, he had high hopes of her becoming a school teacher. But just prior to completing high school (which would have qualified

her to teach), she married, returned home and began farming herself. In the early 1940's, my father married my mother and the seven of us were born in rapid succession. When he died in 1956 at the age of 71, his children still at home ranged in age from two to thirteen. I was almost nine.

During the 1940's my father operated the farm primarily by himself, with some hired labor from relatives. My mother, while she assisted where she could, was generally too busy having a baby or taking care of a new one to be of consistent help. My father's second set of children included three boys. As the two oldest came of age, he taught them how to plow—around age nine. At the time my father died, my thirteen year old brother, Ivory Lee, in addition to knowing the mechanics of making the entire farm operation work, could be sent to plow a field by himself—he going off to one, my father to another.

My father was a good and patient teacher, and we learned to do things early. Everybody had a part to play. Those who were too young for heavier duties were kept busy with less taxing chores around the farm: setting out, hoeing and gathering vegetables, churning milk to make butter, helping to prepare vegetables and other foods for canning, stripping cane, gathering wood, picking cotton, pulling corn, helping to feed the animals and gathering berries in the woods for canning and preserving.

One of my most vivid memories is of the family working as a team on Saturday mornings in the final fall gathering of sweet potatoes. We would be told on Friday night after evening chores at supper what the Saturday duties were. My oldest brother or my dad would plow the potatoes up so that by the time the rest of us had finished breakfast and headed to the field, the potatoes would be lying on top of the freshly turned earth. The youngest of us would begin going along the rows putting the potatoes in small piles as we went, then later into larger ones. Others would gather straw from the strawpatch across the road. Someone would bring sticks, another would begin gathering the small piles of sweet potatoes in a galvanized "foot tub" and make a larger pile. Then the work of "banking" the potatoes would begin—putting the straw into a "bed" underneath the potatoes, then using the sticks and straw to build a cone-shaped house over the bed of potatoes to keep out the cold and frost bite, thereby preserving the potatoes for use during the winter months. Around noon, the task completed, my father would come back from the barnyard or field, proclaim a job well done or say what was wrong, and add a few finishing touches here or there.

Our livestock operation included cattle, hogs, and, occasionally, goats. The cows were used for beef, their milk for cooking and drinking as well as to supplement my mom's milk for the babies. Hogs were slaughtered each year, most of the meat being stored in the smokehouse. My father purchased little food from the store, raising most of it on the farm instead. During the summers, because pork would not keep in the hot, humid weather, we bought a little salt pork to cook vegetables with. Chicken provided a steady supply of meat and eggs. Beef was canned in jars for winter use and we shared some with neighbors (as we did most everything). My father also did black-smithing for himself and the neighbors—shoeing horses, making ax and plow handles with hickory wood, filing plows and, later, saws for the timber people. He would also attend to his and the neighbors' sick animals. From the corn patch reserved for "roasting ears" we pulled corn to shell and be taken to the grist mill for grinding into corn meal. The livestock was fed with the hay and corn that we produced.

Although the cotton harvest was not ready until late August at the earliest, my father never kept us out of shcool for prolonged periods (as did a lot of farmers). Some children would not turn up in school until late November, a good two and a half months after school had started. About a quarter of our fifty acres was planted in cotton, another half in corn and the other quarter in food crops. After school started, we worked mostly in the afternoons and on Saturdays, missing a day or two from school here and there if my father was in a pinch to finish out a bale of cotton, for example. But our absences were never excessive, and never for weeks at a time. After walking the three miles through the woods from the one-room schoolhouse where "Miss Kate" (Mrs. Bessie Chess) singlehandedly taught some seventy-five children of black farmers, we would quickly grab a snack from the "warmer" on the wood stove and head for the cotton patch, picking until sundown before returning home for supper and homework. On returning from the fields, my father and brothers would head to the "lot" (barnyard) to feed the animals for the night. Supper over, he would sometimes listen to some of us "recite" lessons before retiring to bed. The next day, it would all begin again.

In 1947, the exodus of black farmers from the Naheola community began and it continued into the early 1950's. The lumber company began asking the

farmers to leave, and poor whites, timber camps and the white-faced cows replaced them. My father was the sole remaining black left under the old arrangement. Because of his resourcefulness and the many services which he was able to perform for the landowners, he was asked to stay. He could barbeque for the big hunts and parties which the owners held, mend fences, perform blacksmithing, keep the place up and serve as on-site caretaker. Relatives and in-laws were forced to make their way elsewhere. Soon, however, the whites who had replaced them gave up on farming, abandoning the land as abruptly as they had come, and the planting of pine trees became even more pervasive. More and more land was now covered with trees or converted into pasture for the cows. But my father hung on, tending to his farm and looking after the other lands.

On May 4, 1956, while plowing in his corn field, my father felt pains in his chest as he often had. Making his way to the house where my mother was, he asked for baking soda (he thought it was indigestion again), but the pain did not let up. At the hospital, eighteen miles away in Butler, the county seat, the doctors diagnosed a heart attack and said they would perform surgery if he would pay the $250.00 for admission to the hospital. Because they were general practitioners and because he felt he was dying anyway, my father refused to allow my mother to pay. He chose instead to go to a hospital in York, Alabama, another 32 miles distant, where he died the next day.

1955 had been a good year for my father. After harvest and having paid off his farm operating debts, he purchased a 21-cubic foot deep freezer for my mother so that she would not have to spend so much time in the hot kitchen canning over the wood stove. It was our first electrical appliance. And, after sending away to the mail order store as usual for the children's winter school clothes and shoes, there had been money left over—$450.00. In the emergency room, he proclaimed that it would not be touched, that he was dying and would do so with or without the surgery, and that the money was for his wife and children. He could leave that much.

On the morning after my father was buried, my thirteen year old brother donned a paid of overalls and a blue chambray shirt he had worn so often, turned around in the doorway and said to all of us assembled there: "Daddy is dead now, and from now on, I'm in charge. From now on, I'm the man of this family and don't nobody ever forget it," picked up the milk buckets and went out to milk the cows. He set about the task my father had taught him so well, harvesting a bumper crop of corn that year.

But things soon began to change radically. Within two weeks, my mother was notified by an agent of the lumber company that the owners did not think she and the children could handle what my father had been doing, that it would be necessary for us to move, and that she should begin looking around for somewhere else to go by fall. We harvested the crops and left.

We moved to another community in Pennington, to a farm-house owned by a relative, with an agreement that we would pay $75.00 a year for rent while farming three or four acres of land that surrounded the house. Unlike the snug, albeit crowded, little house we had enjoyed, we now lived in a large rambling, drafty old house that had seen better days. The land was poor, not even approximating the bale-per-acre land we were used to. It was difficult to make the $75.00 rent even off the cotton crop that it yielded. No matter how hard we tried to dig a living out of those few acres, we could not. My mother, for the first time since her marriage, went to work outside the home, serving as a domestic in Pennington for $2.00 per day. Her new employers were themselves newcomers who had come for jobs. Their employer was the newly-established Marathon Southern paper company, located less than a mile from our old farm and almost in the middle of the former farming community I had grown up in.

When a tornado struck the barn a few years later, killing my father's two prize mules, Jim and Frank, my mother and brother decided to give up farming. My mother concentrated her energies on trying to build a permanent house for her family. Using some heir property over which my maternal grandfather was guardian, my mother set about the task of building a home for her seven children, board by board, room by room, hiring somebody to help when there was enough money, enlisting the help of her relatives and children throughout. By early 1960, she was in possession of a structure that could be called home. She continued to grow a good deal of food, but farming as we had known it was out. My oldest brother had, by then, taken a job after school in the cafeteria of the new paper plant. The rest of us helped out where we could, going to work on the farms of other people.

A few black farmers in our new community farmed hundreds of acres of cotton for absentee white landowners, farming not with mules but with cultivators and tractors. We (along with most

residents) became farmworkers, picking the cotton for wages. By the time I graduated from high school in 1964, this too, was gone. Cotton picking machines had obviated the need for human labor in the harvesting of the crop. In 1966, the house, which my mother had so laboriously built, burned. Homeless again, and with her own parents now dead, my mother this time chose Thompkinsville, a Pennington community adjacent to Naheola. She purchased a small house and several acres of land on which she is able to grow some of her own food.

Meanwhile, the Marathon paper mill, a division of American Can Company, began operations in late 1956 and quickly began to spread itself out over the Naheola community. In fact, today, of the flourishing farming community that existed there less than thirty years ago, all that is left is the paper mill and the pine trees.

I returned to Naheola in 1978 in search of the house site. I wanted to walk around and feel the place, to see once again where I had come from. Driving down a narrow access road, I began to look for familiar landmarks: the "fork" in the road across from which our house had sat; the "edge of the woods" where our cornfields began. Driving and driving, I could not see any of this. I thought my timing was off, perhaps I had missed the turn. I went back, retracing the way. Nothing familiar. I kept driving, to see if I would stumble upon something, to see where the road led. It merely came to a dead-end. I got out and looked for the muscadine orchard that used to be down under the hill from the syrup mill; perhaps I could get my bearings that way. Just Marathon's pine trees. There was not even a hint of me there. Somewhat overcome, I stood for a while and then left, telling no one, not even my mother.

Today, no one farms in Pennington. Many of the children of the farmers who were forced off the land to make way for the paper mill went to cities to live. Some of the sons of those farmers, now middle aged, work for the Allison Lumber Company today, rising at dawn to ride the twenty or so miles daily on the company-provided bus. Their children, the grandchildren of those farmers, make their way out of Pennington as soon as they reach majority, most of them travelling to distant cities in the North. The paper mill provided jobs for only a select few of the local people, both whites and blacks. For the most part, the mill imported workers from neighborhing Mississippi and other areas. Many of them are still commuters; others have set up residence in Pennington. Despite the fact that the paper mill employs well over 2,500 people in its 24-hour operations, Pennington has not grown significantly. In 1950, there were two general merchandise stores; today, there is one grocery store, a convenience store and a service station. A branch bank has been established, but its main purpose is for the convenience of the mill workers when getting their checks cashed.

Not only is Pennington not growing; it is dying. The average age of blacks living in Pennington is more than 50. Its former residents are scattered throughout the northern part of the United States, working for General Motors in Detroit, the government in Washington, in offices, factories and as domestics in Chicago, Cleveland and California.

The Young children followed the same basic pattern. Of the seven, three live in New York (one is recuperating in Alabama from an illness); two in Virginia (just outside Washington, D.C.); one in Chicago, one in Texas. None are in farming. The oldest and youngest sons are in the United States Army (all three sons have served), one having served now almost twenty years, the other doing his second hitch. The middle son is an accountant. Two of the four daughters are in food service, while one of the other two is an administrative assistant and the other a lawyer.

After a short, six month stay in New York at age 18, I returned home following a family crisis and chose to remain, working first for a newly-formed farmers cooperative for five years and later educating myself in Alabama schools and universities. In December, 1977, I completed my studies at the Cumberland School of Law of Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama and went to work immediately thereafter for an organization concerned with rural economic development in the southeast. In January 1980, I left Alabama to take a job in Washington, D.C.

At 59, my mother remains on the land.

A Poor Harvest

Some Thoughts on Native American Agriculture

David A. Larsen

The ownership and control of land is the most important issue facing American Indians. Indians hold title to vast tracts of agricultural land, but for a number of reasons most of this land is not being farmed by Indians. And the rate of return on the land that is being farmed by native Americans is nearly half what it is for non-Indian farmers.

The statistics tell the story: according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), nearly 2.5 million acres of Indian land is classified as agricultural. Of this, 29 percent is irrigated. Last year the gross value of the products grown on both irrigated and non-irrigated Indian land approached $400 million.

Although this appears at first to be a sizeable figure, the BIA further reports that 73 percent of it went to non-Indian operators—that is, farmers, usually with large holdings, who leased the land from its Indian owners. These non-Indian farmers cultivate about 63 percent of all Indian agricultural lands, leaving 29 percent for Indian operators (the remaining 8 percent is idle). Moreover, these leasing arrangements have not always been to the advantage of the tribe leasing the land. Indians have frequently complained that the leases, which are usually handled by the BIA, are for only a fraction of what the land is actually worth.

The main reason why more Indians are not farming their own land—the reason why so much of it is leased—is a lack of access to government farm loan programs that help farmers get started and offer technical assistance once their operations are underway, according to Indian advocates. Government agencies such as the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) and the Soil Conservation Service, they say, are failing to reach out adequately to Indian farmers.

Those few Indians who are farming are harvesting lower crop yields than their non-Indian counterparts, again, it is charged, due to a lack of government assistance. For non-irrigated land, the gross return per acre for Indians was $68, compared to $119 for non-Indians. Irrigated land brought a $340 gross return per acre for the Indian farmer, compared to $546 for the non-Indian operator.

To address the problem of Indian land ownership and lower productivity, a conference was held in February, 1979, in Albequerque, New Mexico. The gathering was called the First Annual American Indian and Alaska Native Agricultural Conference and it was sponsored by BIA, ACTION, FmHA and the National Tribal Chairmen's Association.

Most of the meeting participants were Indian farmers who were selected to reflect regional diversity and a variety of farming methods. Among the main areas of concern to Indian agriculturalists that were investigated by conference participants were forestry, ranching and livestock, tribal farming and individual farming.

Those at the forestry sessions said their problems stemmed from difficulties in management and organization, poor funding and a need to improve education and training for forestry personnel. In

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addition, it was noted that BIA has received insufficient funding, resulting in poor services to the tribes, which means poor tribal development of timber resources and of banking sources and private investors.

Ranchers and livestock operators viewed access to funding and loan programs, improved market awareness and improved land use planning as pre-eminent. One recommendation was that an Indian be appointed to fill a cabinet level position in the U.S. Department of Agriculture that would be responsive to Indian trust needs. In essence, this would mean that programs and funds would be specifically geared to Indian agricultural operations.

Tribal farmers expressed similar concerns regarding FmHA, BIA and Small Business Administration (SBA) loans. They also cited the need for improved training and the lack of coordination between government agencies on Indian affairs.

Individual farmers, meanwhile, added problems with land acquisition and land consolidation to the list.

Farming the land is nothing new to the American Indian. It is now accepted that Indian agriculture in North America had its beginnings during the Late Archaic or Early Woodland period—around 3,000 years ago. The process involved the gradual diffusion of squash, corn and beans from what is now Mexico and Central America.

With the flood of European immigrants to the New World came a new value system regarding land—a system that ran counter to Indian values. Land title had previously been nonexistent. The Indian's legal system had been the tribal council which had been, as it is today, the final arbitrator in any Indian legal disputes. Going over the heads of these tribal councils, the white culture began to take land in the name of church, state and private individuals.

Laws were soon passed by Congress regulating trade between Indians and non-Indians. One act, for instance, made it a misdemeanor to negotiate with Indians for the purchase of their lands without first receiving federal permission. These acts have formed the basis for several Indian land claims pending today, claims that could result in the returning of hundreds of thousands of acres to their original Indian owners.

Indian farmers face many challenges and many opportunities in the years ahead. Energy, once considered abundant and cheap, is playing an ever more important role in agriculture, and will mean higher prices for fertilizers, pesticides, farm equipment and fuel. Increased energy costs could make or break the small farmer. These higher costs could result in increased on-reservation processing and manufacturing of goods. Centralized, on-reservation production—from the time that the seed is planted until it is made into a loaf of bread—might mean increased return for a tribe.

Many of the tribes are also expressing concern and interest in on-reservation alternative energy development. New processing facilities using solar, wind, wood and low-head hydro power will further increase the competitiveness of tribal operations. To cut fuel costs, tribes will want to pursue other alternatives such as alcohol fuel distillation (as several are now doing). Foods now grown on reservations that could be used for distillation include cattail rhysomes, sugar beets, corn, wheat and potatoes.

The issues facing the Indian agriculturist in the 1980s are complex, but energy issues, the farming of more land and the better use of present Indian landholdings are key. Therefore, the improved planning, management and organization of existing operations should be a priority for the tribal farm or the individual farmer. More centralized farming will help eliminate the middle-man, return more funds to the reservation and help with the tribal balance of payments. This in turn will raise the standard of living of reservation inhabitants by making available the capital necessary to provide long-needed services.

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"We Can't Buy Any Land"

Farmworkers Plant Cooperative Seeds

Jessie de la Cruz

Editor's note

A key issue for small farmers in the West is the enforcement of the Reclamation Act of 1902. This is a law stating that only small- and medium-sized farmers should be the ones to benefit from federal irrigation projects that provide water at subsidized rates to western farmers.

Since its enactment in 1902, however, the law has rarely been enforced, and today many corporate and other large landholders are receiving the cheap federal water. Meanwhile, small farmers for whom the irrigation projects were originally intended have been left high and dry, for the most part.

In the following article, Jessie de la Cruz talks about her efforts to start a small farm in the Westlands Water District of California, a federal irrigation district where most of the acreage is under the control of wealthy landowners. Ms. de la Cruz is an officer of National Land for People (NLP), which since 1959 has been trying to get the government to enforce the 1902 Reclamation Act. Among other things, NLP is calling for enforcement of size limitations on farms receiving federal water, and a public lottery to redistribute all land in excess of those limits.

As a child, I used to hear my grandfather and father talking about buying a farm. They died before their plans could become a reality, but their dream was passed on to me. I always wanted to work on my own farm, and this dream has come true, at least part of it.

My husband and I would talk about what it would be like if we had a farm—what it would be like to have year-round employment, our own house, and a place to raise our four boys and two girls. But our wages as farmworkers were so low that it seemed just a hopeless dream; what we earned went for the barest necessities. We worked only during the summer. All the members of our family saved a little money to tide us over the winter, but every year we had to borrow money from a loan company, which we would repay when we worked.

In 1972, we talked to many of our friends about buying some land. We told them we could never do it alone, but if we had a group, we could. Soon about 200 families were attending our meetings.

One who came was a man from New York who said he was a festival promoter and that he was going to hold a musical festival for us and raise four million dollars to buy the land.

We made a lot of plans during our meetings. We would form our community, where we would have our houses, family-owned businesses, a day care center for the children, and a rest home for the elderly. It would be 640 acres in size. A committee of five was formed (my husband and I were part of it), and we travelled to Fresno to visit a man who we had heard had to sell his land. He had signed a contract to sell his excess land after irrigating his vast land-holdings with federally-subsidized water

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Before she turned to farming in 1973, Jessie de la Cruz was a farmworker and later the first woman to serve as a field organizer for the United Farm Workers. As noted above, she is also Secretary-Treasurer of National Land for People. Ms. de la Cruz is one of three women profiled in Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change, *by Ellen Cantarow (McGraw-Hill, Feminist Press; 1980).*

for ten years. I told him about all the families who wanted to have their own farm and wanted to buy some of his land. He wanted to know if we had a half-million dollars for a down payment. We had worked for this man for many years; he knew my husband well, and he knew him to be honest and hardworking. But we knew he was not going to sell the land to us.

At our next meeting I told the group what the man's response had been. They became discouraged and went their own separate ways. The festival promoter disappeared, and we never heard from him again.

Still, some of us were not discouraged. The farmer who owned the land where the festival was to have been held rented us six acres, and with the help of a $500 loan the six families which remained started farming. Soon, we learned of a man who had forty acres for sale. It was marginal land which had lain idle for many years; there were giant tumble weeds to be burned, the land had no water and it needed leveling. Still, we gave what money we had as down payment. That year we were unable to farm it, so we farmed the six acres. We used a horse and plow to prepare the land for planting, employing manure as fertilizer. We worked on hands and knees planting cherry tomatoes and hot chili, and everyone worked—from the youngest to the oldest—in the six families. We put in stakes for the tomato plants, tied the plants to the stakes, irrigated, tied some more string to the plants, weeded and tied some more. We did everything it takes to raise a tomato crop. At the end of the harvest—after picking, sorting and packing our tomatoes—we had earned $64,000. We could not believe it. $64,000 out of six acres? We paid back the $500 loan, paid the rent on the six acres, paid for the plants and the boxes we'd used for packing, paid 15 percent of what we made to a middleman, paid our wages and we still had money left over to pay for our 40 acres.

By this time we were only four families. We leveled our 40 acres, dug a well and bought a used pump. In 1974 we planted our first crop of cherry tomatoes, organic onions and bell peppers, and had a bumper crop.

We're still farming our land, which has been divided into four sections—one for each family. We share what we have and help each other. In 1975, for instance, our pump broke and we had to dig a new well and get a new pump at a cost of $20,000. We still lost half of our crop.

Our family has its own ten acres to farm, but it is not enough. We would like to have a larger farm—maybe 75 to 100 acres—where we can farm with our married sons and their families, and my married daughter and her family. Ten acres requires a lot of hard work because all you can grow is row crops. We would like to plant fruit and nut trees, vines, cotton, alfalfa—crops that will bring in money—while still having five or so acres for our row crops. We would like to buy some land in the Westlands District, which is where the best soil is and where irrigation water is available from the federal government. There, we would not run the risk of losing our crop when a pump breaks down. Those federal irrigation projects were built to benefit small family farmers. But so far this is not happening because the current landowners are selling to rich friends, relatives, land speculators and foreign investors.

I have been with National Land for People (NLP) since its formation in 1959. NLP is fighting for enforcement of the 1902 law so that this land can be made available to us—all those who want to be farmers. But this will only happen if a lottery is used to sell this land. Farmers like us should be given a chance. Those who want to be farmers should live on their farm. How can you farm out of a Manhattan building? This is why we say buyers must live on the land, or live no more than fifteen miles away or in the nearest incorporated town. We also want the land at pre-water prices as the law specifies, which is the only way we can afford to buy it. We're asking that the Department of the Interior enforce this law and put people back to work the land. We're talking about year-round employment, which would open jobs for other people as well.

We're saying that all this can be done simply by making use of an old American tradition—the lottery. That's how our sons went to fight a war to defend our country. Two of my sons spent four years each fighting a war, and yet we can't buy any land.

We can grow better, healthier food than larger farmers, food that is free from pesticides. We don't plow under our crops if we can't sell them, nor do we feed them to pigs and cattle. Instead, we give them away to those who can't afford to buy any.

I'm praying that 1980 makes my father's and grandfather's dream a reality; that I get my farm and my own home, along with many others who are still waiting.

Last and Still Least

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in U.S. Agriculture

Alice Larson

Migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) are a dilemma in today's society. Their labor stabilizes and subsidizes the price of food, but the price of this stabilization could be seen as human abuse. [1] There are approximately 5 million MSFWs in this country[2] who provide seasonal farm labor—picking, thinning or weeding crops and fruits, and working in food processing plants and in other areas of agriculture that demand hand labor. [3] They are employed an average of 6.5 months a year, [4] but seldom work as long as one month for the same employer. Seasonal farmworkers are generally defined as local residents who work in the same area in which they live. Migrants, on the other hand, generally cannot return to their home at night and live in temporary housing while working. Migrants can travel within states (intrastate migrants) or travel across the nation (interstate migrants.) [5] Most migrants travel as families, [6] including children of all ages.

Dependence on MSFW labor creates several paradoxes for social and economic policy in the United States.

The Economic Paradox — Humanization of Working Conditions Versus Keeping Food Prices Down

A central paradox is that while society has a need for a group that will perform unpleasant and sometimes hazardous seasonal farm work at remote rural locations for very low wages, it also expresses concern for the health and welfare of this same group.

In 1973, it was estimated that 5.9 billion hours of farm labor went into agricultural production at a cost of $4.8 billion. In relation to total farm operating costs, however, "the cost of hired farm labor was less than half what the farmer spent for machinery and equipment and equalled the combined total for purchase of fuel and fertilizers." In 1976, farm labor accounted for $89.2 billion, or 8.3 percent of farm production costs, but this was "a much smaller percentage [than in 1973] of food consumers' expenses." [7]

The production of food in this country is based on the availability of cheap agricultural labor. As the Congressional Research Service has noted:

> The migratory farmworker performs an indispensable role in meeting the seasonal work demands of planting, cultivating, harvesting and processing our Nation's agricultural products. Working in a succession of short-term jobs, the migrant and his family must move from one area to another, making themselves available to meet peak worker

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> shortages for labor intensive fruit and vegetable crops throughout the country. Highly perishable crops, such as blueberries, asparagus, or strawberries, must be harvested, and harvested within a relatively limited amount of time. Delay spells serious economic consequences not only for the farmer and his employees, but for the entire agricultural and rural economy and the Nation's food supply. A senior staff economist at the Department of Labor estimated that without migratory labor the United States could lose over $500 million in agricultural production during the Summer of 1974 [8]

It is generally believed that providing MSFWs with higher wages, work-related benefits, adequate health services, decent housing, protective legislation and guaranteed access to transportation would substantially increase the cost of their labor. These increases, it is thought, would be reflected in increasing food prices. Therefore, the paradox: yes, we want to help the MSFW have a good and secure life, but no, we don't want our food bills to rise as a result. This paradox is summed up by the Task Panel on MSFWs, part of the President's Commission on Mental Health: "It is ironic and tragic that despite the efforts of the Federal Government in recent years, the problems of farmworkers in this Nation have remained so intractable, especially when one considers the vital contribution of the farmworker to the life of this Nation and to its economy." [9]

The Paradox of the Illegal Alien — Are They a Blessing or a Curse?

In an effort to secure cheap labor, agricultural producers have traditionally turned to alien workers. Sometimes this involves importing workers under contracts with foreign countries and U.S. dependents, as is currently done in upstate New York and New England where agribusiness corporations contract with the governments of Puerto Rico and Jamaica for laborers. It can also be done by directly or indirectly encouraging the use of laborers from neighboring countries through the institution of favorable immigration policies or the non-enforcement of existing immigration laws, thus allowing thousands of illegal aliens to cross the border for the sole purpose of performing seasonal agricultural work.

No one knows for certain how many illegal aliens are in the United States. A recent contract between the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and a private consulting firm to obtain exact figures got entangled in politics and cost over-runs and was abruptly cancelled before it could be completed.[10] Estimates of the number of illegal aliens range from 3 to 12 million, with a million more coming into the country every year. It has also been estimated that 90 percent of these illegal workers are Mexicans.[11] What brings Mexican nationals to the United States is poverty in Mexico. "Half of Mexico's 18 million-member labor force is unemployed," the peso has been devalued, prices are "spiraling," and the "the country's 3.5 percent population growth is one of the world's highest." As summarized by a U.S. border patrolman, "They're starving to death down there."[12]

Alien seasonal workers, for the most part, are not treated well in the United States. To begin with, they are taken advantage of by unscrupulous "coyotes" who smuggle them into the United States by dangerous means for a high fee or charge them outrageous prices for false documents, often which are never delivered. Once in this country, the illegals are abused by employers who prey on their fear of being deported, often paying them less than the minimum wage and breaking federal regulations, secure in the knowledge that these workers will not complain to authorities and draw attention to their illegal status. In fact, employers who have been turned in for violations cannot be prosecuted, since technically no federal law has been broken. Furthermore, "employers have been known to notify authorities of the whereabouts of illegals they employ after the working season has ended and before the workers are paid."[13] In other words, "because the economic rewards far outweigh the liabilities, the party which stands to gain the most from 'breaking the law' [the employer] is also the most protected from its negative sanctions."[14]

The United States' attitude toward Mexican nationals who perform seasonal agricultural work has fluctuated between invitation and expulsion. During the labor shortage of World War I, Mexican seasonal workers were welcomed, but during the Depression years, "people of Mexican descent were 'repatriated', including legal and undocumented

immigrants, temporary workers, permanent resident aliens and even United States citizens." During World War II there was again a need for additional labor. To fill it, the United States in 1942 instituted the "Bracero Program" which allowed Mexican nationals to legally enter and leave the United States to perform farm work. According to one estimate, 4.8 million Mexican workers were involved in this program. However, the cry arose that these legal aliens were taking jobs from United States citizens; the program was ended in 1964 and was followed by a large scale round-up of undocumented aliens. The year after the end of the Bracero Program, "90,000 additional Americans were working on farms, cutting the unemployment rate among farmworkers from 6.5 percent to 4.8 percent."[16]

The enforcement of United States immigration laws, which is authorized under the Immigration and Naturalization Act and is the job of the INS, has always been a problem. There were 875,000 illegals apprehended in 1976 and 1,033,000 in 1977—although not all were seeking seasonal farm work.[16] INS workers have been accused of making "dragnet raids" in search of illegal aliens, often "harrassing" legal citizens while searching for illegals who are apprehended on the basis of mere appearance or ethnicity. In addition, the government crack-down on the employment of illegals has resulted in the "curtailment of the employment of legal Mexican Americans."[17]

On the other hand, the government has also been accused of being too weak in its enforcement of immigration laws. "Official policy seems confused. On the one hand, U.S. Immigration Service patrols catch illegal immigrants at the border . . . on the other, the Service is kept short of funds and personnel so that effective policing of the border is impossible."[18] At least one recent court decision contradicted INS enforcement practices, barring the Service from conducting searches of work-places without warrants specifying suspected illegal aliens by name. INS Commissioner Leonel Castillo has said, "I think you can slow illegal immigration, and you can regulate it and you can manage it a lot better . . . but I don't think you can stop it."[19]

Also, INS Director Castillo has been accused of being 'soft' on illegals by allegedly stressing service rather than enforcement at INS. Changes he has instituted include providing "thousands of dollars worth of soccer equipment for detainees," renaming the INS detention centers "service processing centers," and "unofficially endorsing the establishment of private counseling centers where illegal aliens can go for help without being turned over to immigration officers."[20]

At the present time, Mexican nationals can be legally admitted to the United States to perform temporary farm labor "if it is determined that there is an insufficient number of American workers to take the jobs and if the certification will not adversely affect wages and working conditions of similarly employed American workers." But a Rural Manpower Service report recently noted that "wages are lower in areas that use the foreign workers, and alien workers are employed in areas with high unemployment."[21]

In 1977, the Carter administration introduced legislation to: grant permanent resident status to illegal aliens who entered the United States before 1970; allow those who arrived between 1970 and 1977 to remain in the United States for five years; and impose fines on employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens. These proposals drew fire from labor groups, farm lobbies and Mexican-American organizations. Congress failed to act on the measures. which may be reintroduced in 1980.[22]

But the economic growth in Mexico caused by oil production, which will soon provide massive employment opportunities in that country, may actually be the answer to the influx of Mexican illegals into the United States. In 1978, Vice President Walter Mondale offered Mexican President Portillo "expanded efforts by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to increase rural development efforts in Mexico," and indicated that "no massive deportations or roundups" of illegal aliens would occur in the United States.[23] Still. the issue of alien workers is far from vanishing. President Carter, during his recent trip to Mexico, was roundly criticized by President Portillo on the matter of illegals. Portillo noted that "This, Mr. President, I believe is the most serious matter of our times—the fact that there are men who can buy men and that there are men who have to sell themselves. And this is what happens very frequently with our poor people that go to the United States."

And, the question remains whether there is a real desire or need to curb the tide of illegal workers flowing into this country. As one Los Angeles newspaper columnist has observed, "The illegal alien is exploited and condemned in the same breath."[24] No one knows for certain that illegal

workers take away jobs from United States citizens and no one knows to what extent these workers are used in agriculture or what would be the impact of their exclusion from the work force.

The shrillest cry in support of illegal workers comes from farm employers. Farmers in Texas, Oregon and Idaho, for example, insist that the employment of illegals is essential to agricultural production. They are of the opinion that illegals "fill many jobs that nobody else wants, even in a period of high unemployment."[25] Idaho farmers recall our first paradox in their support of illegal workers: "To those who complain about current food prices, we would ask this question: will you pay enough for the food on your table to allow agriculture to pay the kind of money to attract American workers into our fields?"[26] These farmers and others would like to see the Bracero Program revived.[27]

The Mechanization Paradox—Technological Advances Versus the Need to Retrain MSFWs

Due perhaps in part to a perceived instability in seasonal farm labor, machines are increasingly being used in areas that once were the domain of hand farm labor. But herein lies another paradox: the extent of this mechanization is by no means total, so retraining all MSFWs for other occupations cannot take place without the country losing a much-needed work force. In other words, while we appear to be a country that is intent on going mechanized, we still need the farmworkers we are rendering jobless.

Technology in agriculture began to be introduced in the 1940s in the cotton industry and in the orchard industry in the form of mechanical devices to shake nuts and fruits from trees. In the 1950s, machines that could pick corn, rice and sugar beets were introduced. In the 1960s, tomato and grape harvesters began to be used.[28] By 1968, 58 percent of all vegetable acres planted in vegetables were being harvested by machine; by 1975, the figure had risen to 73 percent. In 1968, only 1 percent of all fruit acreage was harvested by machine. In 1975, the figure was 17 percent.[29]

There is some question as to whether this trend will continue. According to one source, the University of California at Davis and Riverside is working on 29 mechanization projects—perfecting inventions to harvest wine grapes, raisin grapes, lettuce, strawberries, apples and other unmechanized fruits and vegetables.[30] In fact, "it has been predicted that 'any fruit or vegetable crop that cannot be mechanically harvested will disappear from the consumers' shopping lists due to economic competition from fruits and vegetables that can be mechanized."[31]

On the other hand, experts in the state of Washington note that while mechanization and other innovations have had a significant impact on crops grown in that State, the large apple production still resists mechanization because of difficulty developing a machine that will protect the fruit against bruising. These experts forecast that migrant workers will be needed to harvest this crop "for the foreseeable future."[32] Speaking of all crops, the Task Panel on MSFWs of the President's Commission on Mental Health noted that "there is evidence that this decline [in the need for hand labor due to mechanization] is stabilizing since manual labor continues to be needed for the harvesting of many nonmechanized crops demanded by the consumer."[33]

There have been several reasons offered for the growing mechanization of agriculture. The demands of mass merchandising—including new marketing, processing and packaging techniques—and changes in modes of transportation require more uniformity in the grading and production of agricultural products.[34] But the reason most frequently heard involves problems associated with the use of manual labor. To wit: "Undoubtedly, the rapid increase in labor costs has helped spur sharp advances in mechanization over the last several years and will continue to do so in the future."[35] Contributing factors have been an increase in federal regulations and restrictions governing agricultural workers, and the instability of the seasonal labor pool.[36] As the Chancellor of one of the California universities working on mechanization innovations notes, "the thing that will press for more mechanization will be labor disturbances, strikes, large raises in wages and so forth."[37] The reasoning is that the more agriculture becomes mechanized, the less farmers will have to rely on troublesome seasonal laborers.

But "critics of mechanization believe that the cost of inexpensive food must be measured in terms of what happens to the people involved in the production of this food, and what happens to the rural communities where these people live."[38] The

effect of mechanization on the MSFW has been devastating:

- There has been a loss of 1.2 million farms and 2.8 million farmworkers in the past 30 years.[39]
- "From 1960 to 1970, the need for seasonal farm labor requirements diminished approximately 30 percent."[40]
- "Some 123,000 farmworkers could lose their jobs over the next 10 years [in California] because of mechanization."[41]
- Progress in mechanizing grapes, strawberries, broccoli, brussel sprouts, melons, lettuce and other vegetables once considered unmechanizable, leads one source to state that "if the supply of labor to harvest [these crops] were to be drastically reduced in the next few years, we could be mechanically harvesting them almost immediately."[42]

The MSFW is not the only victim of increasing mechanization. The small family farmer, who can seldom afford to purchase the new machines, has difficulty keeping pace with the large agribusiness corporations and is being squeezed out of the market. The upshot may eventually be agricultural production run entirely by big business.[43]

In California, questions are being raised concerning mechanization research being performed at state universities with state funds. As a United Farm Workers (UFW) lobbyist has pointed out, "In a time of such high unemployment in California . . . it is inconceivable that the State is spending the taxpayers' money to put more people out of work." He estimates that the elimination of temporary farm jobs "could add more than $2 billion to welfare costs."[44]

The inevitability of increasing mechanization, although it is unknown if this mechanization will be total, means that MSFWs must be retrained for alternative employment. By one estimate, "two and a half million new jobs will be needed by 1980 to absorb workers formerly employed in agriculture."[45] Some MSFWs will be able to find jobs related to the new technology in agriculture, such as machinery operation and maintenance. But for most the job outlook in the rural areas in which they live is bleak, which is the primary reason they are in seasonal farmwork in the first place. "In an economy in which demand for farm and unskilled labor is declining, alternative employment is likely to be difficult to find and will likely be less remunerative."[46]

General Status of Farmworkers

The Task Panel on MSFWs of the President's Commission on Mental Health, which was charged in 1978 with determining the mental health of farmworkers, summed up its findings in this way:

> It is the conclusion of the Panel members that, despite the several billions of dollars that have been spent by the Federal Government over the past 15 years, American farmworkers and their families still live and work under conditions which are cruel and harsh by any standard: they are ill-housed, ill-clothed, undernourished, face enormous health hazards, are underpaid, underemployed, undereducated, socially isolated, politically powerless, excluded from much of the worker-protective legislation that other American workers take for granted, and unable to compete in the labor market for the higher wages that would permit them to resolve their own problems or ameliorate the bleak reality of their existence . . . Indeed, to speak of the "mental health needs" of the farmworker seems almost a luxury when their physical and economic needs are so acute and so profound.[47]

MSFWs do not normally choose seasonal farmwork as a profession; they are forced into it due to economic necessity.[48] Most farmworkers, whether seasonal or migrant, come from rural areas of the country, areas "characterized by high unemployment levels, a primarily agricultural economic base and large group of unskilled workers."[49] They choose temporary farmwork for lack of other occupational choices and for lack of other work-related skills. The job itself, which involves long hours in the hot sun or freezing cold at backbreaking stoop labor, has been described as the third most dangerous occupation in this country, with farmworkers "among the lowest paid workers in the nation."[50]

No statistically-valid survey of the MSFW population has ever been undertaken.[51] The only information available is based on small studies of a select segment of the farmworker population, or from large-scale surveys designed for other purposes but

which include counts of MSFWs. Most studies estimate the number of farmworkers (estimates which vary greatly from each other), but do not give data on other population characteristics. This deficient data is often "used in program planning, funding, allocation and service delivery systems design."[52] In addition, the differing and often conflicting definitions of MSFWs used in federal programs cloud determination of eligibility for the client and hinder coordination of services at the local level. The data used here comes from small-scale studies; its accuracy is uncertain, but it is widely accepted as representative of the MSFW population.

General Characteristics

To describe the MSFWs is to describe one of the poorest working classes in the United States today, a group which lives in squalid conditions with little prospect of change. Some of the latest federally-sponsored assessments of the situation in the United States have borne the following demographic statistics:[53]

- In 1974, the average migrant family of four earned less than $1700 from farm work ($3100 total yearly income) and the average seasonal family earned $1000 from farm work ($1840 total yearly income). The poverty level for a rural family of four in 1974 was $4300.[54]
- More than 60 percent of MSFWs were under age 25 in 1974; approximately 35 percent were under age 18.[55]
- The average MSFW family size is estimated to be more than five members.[56]
- The average farmworker has a sixth-grade education.[57]
- In 1975, "the non-farmworker student had a 96 percent chance of entering the 9th grade and an 80 percent chance of entering the 12th grade—migrant students have only a 40 percent chance of entering the 12th grade."[58]

These statistics are comparable to the findings of a 1977 survey of MSFWs in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.[59] More appalling, however, is the fact that these regional statistics differ only slightly from what was reported in a study of migrants in the state of Washington conducted in 1966 for the Office of Economic Opportunity.[60] As Table 1 indicates, there has been little change in the demographic make-up of MSFWs over the past eleven years. Yearly income has risen only $2000, hardly keeping up with inflation and still well below the current poverty level. In fact, adjusting for the slightest increase in average family size, per capita income has risen only from $535 in 1966 to $744 in 1977. Meanwhile, the education level of adult migrants has actually decreased slightly.

Table 1

Farmworker Statistics from 1966 Compared to 1977 Statistics

	1977 HEW Survey	1966 OEO Survey
Family income—yearly average	$3425 from farm work $3575 from all sources	$1150 from farm work $2300 from all sources
Family size—average	4.8 persons	4.3 persons
Age-average	32 years	24 years
Education level for adults—average	6.3 years	8.8 years

Social Welfare

The health of farmworkers and how they are housed are two areas that highlight their relative deprivation compared to the rest of the United States population.

a. Health

"Farmworkers are considered to have the poorest physical and mental health of any group in the United States."[61] The following facts illustrate:

- "Hospitalization of farmworkers for accidents is 50 percent higher than the national rate."
- One survey of MSFW children "showed that all those studied between the ages of 6 and 25 months were anemic."
- One of the most commonly seen maladies among MSFWs is malnutrition, which is a major contributor to other health problems.
- MSFWs have diseases that are "considered cured in the national population," including rickets, polio, tuberculosis and typhoid.
- One study showed every MSFW surveyed had dental problems. Another showed 76 percent of MSFWs studied had dental problems. A third study indicated that the "mean number of decayed teeth per farmworker as 6.8."[62]

b. Housing

"The health of migrant and seasonal farmworkers is directly affected by the low quality of the housing in which they are forced to live both when in their home base and in stream."[63] Housing for migrants, for the most part, is either nonexistent or inadequate. It is characterized by large-scale over-crowding (often four to eight persons live in one room), no electricity, plumbing or insulation and is generally in an advanced stage of disrepair.[64] A 1976 migrant housing study in Kansas termed 69 percent of the units investigated "poor in visible defects, too deteriorated to repair."[65] A 1974 South Carolina migrant housing study of only those camps investigators were allowed by campowners to enter found 60 percent of the camps with no sanitary facilities and nearly 80 percent with only one room for each family.[66]

"While the conditions of migrant housing are poor, the inadequate supply of it is an even more critical problem."[67] The state of Washington has recently called the shortage of housing its number one MSFW-related problem. In the Yakima Valley, the heaviest agricultural producing region of the state, it is not known how many migrants come into the area during the harvesting season or how many housing units exist (a 1976 Yakima County study found 43 labor camp sites, of which only 10 percent were licensed). However, "Yakima County Health District officials estimate that 80 percent of the migrant labor force will be forced to camp on river banks, under bridges and in other unsuitable environments."[68]

Political Power

MSFWs, as a group, are poor, and the poor are notoriously underrepresented in the political system. Migrants face an even grimmer situation. They are viewed by local residents as transients temporarily in the community to do a job necessary to the local economy. Communities "want them here to harvest the crops and then they want them to go."[69] Migrants are therefore "psychologically and geographically isolated from the community in which they work."[70] As temporary residents, they do not vote on community issues and have "no officials elected to serve their interests."[71] In addition, judicial action brought on their behalf often finds them at another work site in another state when the case finally comes up in court.

Those who provide social and economic services to migrants are often described as being "insensitive" to MSFWs, which may be a polite term for "discrimination." MSFWs often charge that others receive service providers.[72] One example was an attempt by service providers.[96] One example was an attempt by Green Giant in Pasco, Washington to expand its agricultural production by adding an additional 100 housing units for migrant workers to go along with the planting of more acreage. Their request to add the housing units was denied by the Pasco County Planning Commission, which "indicated the community takes a dim view of Green Giant bringing 'undesireables' into the community and giving them a year-around place to stay ... tax[ing] local schools with additional students who require bilingual teachers and tax[ing] local welfare resources by going on welfare during the off-season."[73] (A study conducted by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare of service delivery barriers to MSFWs in the Northwest, including Pasco, found that an average of only 3 percent of those on AFDC were MSFWs.)[74]

In the end, the best spokespersons for MSFWs are farmworker organizations—private, nonprofit

organizations involved primarily in providing direct services to or advocating on behalf of MSFWs. Most such programs are supported by the federal government, which tends to put these advocates in the peculiar position of criticizing the hand that feeds them. The UFW has also proven very successful as an advocate for MSFWs, but mostly in California. In most other states, the UFW is seen as attempting to unionize MSFWs and its mere mention usually has a negative effect.[75] One reality that may affect MSFWs in the future is that Hispanics are now the fastest growing minority in the United States, with the potential to soon become the largest minority group (and a sizeable voting block).[76]

Policy Analysis

The major federal problem for MSFWs is the lack of a comprehensive policy. As summarized by President Carter's Reorganization Project: "Federal policies governing assistance to migrants have been characterized by a lack of consistent long-term objectives; disagreements on the size, condition and physical location of the target population; and a fragmented approach to meeting the most basic needs of migrant workers and their families."[77]

The paradoxes mentioned earlier are reflected in government policy. For example, the economic paradox keeps MSFW wages low and the required "fringe benefits"—such as housing, health services, unemployment compensation—to a minimum. The enforcement of immigration laws is ineffective in stopping the flow of illegal farmworkers into the United States. Special employment training programs for MSFWs have been instituted, but the level of funding is far below that required to retrain most MSFWs because of a recognition that a totally successful retraining effort would deplete a much-needed workforce.

An article in a banking magazine published in the State of Washington describes the new regulations to protect MSFWs and their paradoxical impact on agricultural economies:

> During the decade of the 1970s, many civil rights and human rights movements came to the fore nationally. With those growing concerns came a great deal of publicity about working and living conditions of migrant agricultural workers. Low wages, poor housing conditions, lack of adequate health care, inadequate educational opportunities for migrant children, exploitation by farm labor contractors, lack of governmental benefits enjoyed by other groups of workers—all were cited, with and without exaggeration, as conditions that the prosperous U.S. society had an obligation to ameliorate.
>
> The glare of publicity helped to bring about a number of legislated improvements. At the same time, new legislation tended to make the employment of migrants more complex and more costly. . . . The degree of regulation of farm wages and working conditions is also increasing and will have a long-term effect on the direction and cost of Washington agricultural products.[78]

Regulations, seen by farmers as "increasing," are described in quite another way by the Task Force on MSFWs of the President's Commission on Mental Health: "In short, farmworkers cannot control their own destinies so long as Federal and State programs and policies exclude them from the services and protective measures available to the general public."[79]

Most regualtions affecting MSFWs are monitored by the Department of Labor (DOL), although programs for MSFWs are sprinkled throughout the bureaucracy—particularly HEW and FmHA. The Community Services Administration also supports a small number of "advocacy" services for MSFWs and maintains a national "migrant desk."

This diversity of responsibility for MSFW programs is also reflected in state governments, where different agencies administer different programs or are charged with different regulatory responsibilities. To add to this confusion, many of the federal programs that are not administered by the states do not even have a tie to regional federal offices, but instead are administered from Washington, D.C. even though the recipients may be 3000 miles away. There is no one federal office or agent at the national or regional level charged with coordinating this array of programs, regulations and policies, and only a couple of states maintain

such a coordinating office. This also means that MSFWs have no government advocate to watchdog their needs.

In recognition of this coordination problem, and in response to numerous requests to coordinate and integrate MSFW services, policies and regulations,[80] in the fall of 1978 the President's Reorganization Project drafted several coordination proposals. The leading proposal, however, although it centralized MSFW programs in the Community Services Administration, did not administer these programs through separate discretionary grants, but rather lumped most of them together in block grants to the states. (Twenty percent would remain for discretionary grants and 10 percent for research and development.)[81] This proposal was strenuously opposed by farmworker organizations, NAFO and other Hispanic groups. Their opposition was explained in a letter to President Carter:

- "The President's Reorganization Project has failed to solicit meaningful input from the organizations which have the direct contact with and knowledge of farmworker problems [farmworker organizations]."
- The plan "failed to consider economic development, housing, and enforcement of protective legislation as an integral and necessary part of the development of a plan to upgrade the quality of life for farmworkers."
- "Work and travel patterns of farmworkers do not adhere to arbitrary state boundaries... For this reason, services to farmworkers must be coordinated above the state level to ensure continuity of planning and delivery of services throughout the country."
- "History has shown emphatically that farmworker programs should not be administered at a state level... Local and state officials ... for the most part, demonstrated indifference and sometimes hostility to the needs of this special population. In many states, there is a conflict of interest between the needs of farmworkers and the interests of agricultural employers who exert powerful influence over state and local governments and the programs they administer."
- "Community-based organizations have demonstrated their ability to provide services to farmworkers in a more efficient and cost-effective manner than state agencies while still maintaining sensitivity to farmworker needs."[82]

Due to these criticisms, the President's reorganization initiatives were shelved.

One federal agency, DOL, is making an effort to coordinate its MSFW activities. The Employment Standards Administration, a regulatory division of DOL, has been designated to coordinate "the Department's program affecting migrant and seasonal farmworkers" in each of its regional offices.[83] This has resulted in some competition between the regional offices to see which can do the best job. In several regions this has meant expansion of coordination activities beyond departmental lines in an effort to link all federal MSFW programs, regulations and policies.[84]

Problem and Policy Summary

It has been remarked that the MSFW situation presents "a set of interwoven economic and social problems with no single clear cut solution immediately presenting itself."[85] In closing, it seems relevant to look at the most recent documentation concerning national policy on MSFWs: the Task Panel on MSFWs of the President's Commission on Mental Health.

> The panel agrees that unless and until rational policies are developed regarding the supply and demand for agricultural labor which will eliminate or at the very least mitigate the bleak reality of farmworkers' lives, and unless and until the farmworker is included in the social and economic benefits which are shared by other American workers, the exploitation of the agricultural worker will continue.[86]

The national office of HEW agrees, and in its report, "HEW Policy with Respect to MSFWs," maintains that what is necessary is a "coordinated emphasis on":

- upgrading the economic and social circumstances surrounding agricultural employment—assuring that workers' rights and economic and social benefits are protected and available; and reducing hazardous environmental conditions;
- developing a climate in which choice is

possible—providing access to services which raise the health and educational levels of the farmworker population and promoting the development of new occupational skills.[87]

This author generally concurs with these statements, with the added proviso that what is needed is a coordinated policy concerning MSFWs; a policy that, for instance, either works to phase out temporary hand farm labor and phase in the mechanization of most crops, or recognizes a continuing need for seasonal farm labor and allows this workforce to organize. There are several avenues of research that should be pursued to help resolve this and other paradoxes surrounding MSFWs and provide a basis for future policy. These research priorities should include:

- Documentation to develop an accurate data base on MSFWs, detailing the numbers and characteristics of this population. This step is necessary if current policies and programs are to aid this group and if effective future policies and programs are to be designed.
- Investigation of the current extent and projected impact of agricultural mechanization and translation of this information into an employment picture for seasonal agricultural labor. In addition, if total mechanization is found to be inevitable, development of programs to provide alternative employment for rural people and retraining techniques that can be used to channel the MSFW workforce into other occupations.
- Detailing of the current situation regarding Mexican illegal aliens drawn into this country to perform seasonal farm labor, including numbers and the true dependency of agricultural production on this segment of the labor force. In addition, effort should be given to forecasting the impact Mexico's increased oil production might have on that nation's economy.
- Study of the true relationship between increasing seasonal farm wages and work-related benefits for MSFWs, and the nation's food production costs.

Notes

1. "Crime" as defined in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, "is a gross violation of human law; any aggravated offense against morality". One would be hard pressed to deny that 'gross violation of human law' is occuring in the same fields from which this nation produces and harvests food and fiber at quantities and qualities unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. "Report to the U.S. Senate on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers," Report Number 967, U.S. Senate, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, 1968.
2. Task Panel on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers of the President's Commission on Mental Health, *Report of the Task Panel* (Washington, D.C., 1978), p. 12.
3. Some definitions of MSFWs include migrant fishermen and migrant workers in the lumber industry. These categories will not be considered MSFWs for purposes of this paper.
4. InterAmerica Research Associates, *An Evaluation of Access to and Availability of Human Resource Programs for Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Region X.* performed under contract to the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Region X (Seattle, Washington, 1978), p. 11.
5. Approximately half of the migrants surveyed in Idaho, Oregon and Washington in the InterAmerica study, noted in footnote 4, said their home, or place they lived the longest during the year, was in Texas. Over 75% of all migrants surveyed indicated their home was in a state other than the one in which they were surveyed. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
6. It is "assumed" by most sources that most migrants are really migrant families although no definitive statistics have proven this fact. Many migrants are single men who leave their families at home and travel either by themselves or in crews made up of single men. In other instances, many working couples leave their children at home with relatives or friends (sometimes so the children can remain in school) while they perform migratory farm labor. On the other hand, many migrant families (really households) have been found to be made up of a nuclear family, including

children; members of the extended family, grandparents, uncles, etc.; and children of neighbors' families "back home" who are not directly related to others in the household.

7. Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
8. Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, *Federal and State Statutes Relating to Farmworkers* (Washington, D.C., 1976), pp. 100-101.
9. Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
10. *U.S. News and World Report*, "Illegal Aliens: Invasion Out of Control?" January 29, 1979, p. 40.
11. *Time*, "Its Your Turn in the Sun, Now 19 Million and Growing Fast, Hispanics Are Becoming a Power," October 16, 1978, p. 58.
12. *Ibid.*, p.61.
13. InterAmerica Research Associates, *Migrant Child Welfare: A State of the Field Study of Child Welfare Services for Migrant Children and Their Families Who Are In-Stream, Home Based or Settled Out, A Review of the Literature and Legislation*, performed under contract to the National Center for Child Advocacy, Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (Washington, D.C., 1977), p. 138.
14. Edward G. Baumheier, et. al.,*The Migrant Farm Worker: Social Programs, Policies, and Research* (Social Welfare Research Institute, Center for Social Research and Development, University of Denver, Denver Colorado, 1973), p. 29.
15. *U.S. News and World Report, op. cit.*, p. 39.
16. *Seattle Times*, "U.S. Chicanos Plagued by Poverty and Discrimination," November 5, 1978.
17. InterAmerica, *Child Welfare, op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.
18. *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, "Mexamerica is on the Move," date unknown.
19. *U.S. News and World Report, op.cit.* pp. 38-39.
20. *Time, op. cit.*, p. 61.
21. InterAmerica Research Associates, *An Assessment of the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Situation in the United States*, performed under contract to the Community Services Administration (Washington, D.C. 1976), p. 125.
22. *U.S. News and World Report, op. cit.*, p. 40.
23. *Los Angeles Times*, "No Massive Deportation, Mondale Vows," January 21, 1978.
24. *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, "Illegal Aliens: Are Job Fears Unfounded?" November 8, 1978.
25. *Time, op. cit.*, p.61.
26. *Idaho Statesman*, "Illegal Aliens Fill Farm-Labor Vacuum (Boise, Idaho), June 1, 1977.
27. *Yakima Herald-Republic*, "Farm Laborers, Improve Their Image Say State Orchardists" (Yakima, Washington), December 5, 1978.
28. *Nuestro*, "123,000 Jobs Less?" June, 1978, p. 60.
29. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.
30. *Nuestro, op. cit.*, p. 60.
31. Baumheier, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
32. Rainier National Bank, Economics Department, "Farm Finance: Impacts of Farm Labor,"*Agrotrends* (Seattle, Washington), Vol. 4, No. 4, December, 1978, p. 6.
33. Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
34. Baumheier, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
35. Rainier National Bank, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
36. Baumheier, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
37. Nuestro, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
38. Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
39. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.*, p. 48.
40. Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
41. *Nuestro, op. cit.*, p. 60.
42. Baumheier, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
43. Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
44. *Nuestro, op. cit.*, p. 60.
45. Baumheier, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
46. InterAmerica *An Assessment, op. cit.*, p. 51.
47. Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
48. Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
49. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.* p. 24.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
51. The following studies are some of those which have documented the lack of demographic and numerical data on MSFWs:

    Commission on Civil Rights, *Counting the Forgotten* (Washington, D.C.), 1974.

InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.*
InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.*
InterAmerica, *Child Welfare, op. cit.*
InterAmerica Research Associates, *Region X Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Population Estimators Report,* performed under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Welfare, Region X (Seattle, Washington, 1977).
Legal Services Corporation, *An Estimate of the Number of Migrant And Seasonal Farmworkers in the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico* (Washington, D.C., 1977).
National Association of Farmworker Organizations, *Report of the Fourth Annual Conference* (Washington, D.C., 1977).
U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of the Secretary, *HEW Policy with Respect to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers* (Washington, D.C., 1978).
Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.*
Rural America, *Where Have All the Farmworkers Gone? (The Statistical Annihilation of Hired Farmworkers), An Analysis of the Federal Effort to Define and Count Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers* (Washington, D.C., 1977).

52. InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.*, p. 42.
53. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.*
54. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
58. HEW, *HEW Policy,* op. cit., p. 42.
59. InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.* Figures noted are from internal documents from this study.
60. Consulting Services Corporation, *Migrant Farm Workers in the State of Washington,* performed under contract to the Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D.C. (Seattle, Washington, 1966).
61. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.*, p. 137.
62. InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.*, p. 182-183.
63. HEW, *HEW Policy, op. cit.*, p. 60.
64. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.*, pp. 215-217, 226.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
67. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.*, p. 225.
68. Yakima County Conference of Governments, *Yakima County Housing, Market Analysis* (Yakima, Washington, 1976), p. 35.
69. InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.*, p. 35. Comments are from local providers of social services commenting on the attitudes of their local community.
70. InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.* p. 255.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
72. InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.*, p. 35.
73. Alice Larson, "State Coordinator's Report, Migrant Health/Housing Study, Washington State Migrant Housing Regulation and Enforcement," internal report developed as part of: *A National Study of Temporary Farm Labor Housing and Its Effect on the Health of Agricultural Workers,* performed under contract to the Division of Organizational Development, Bureau of Community Health Services, Health Services Administration, Silver Spring, Maryland (Seattle, Washington, 1978).
74. InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.*, p. 152.
75. For example, the 1979 awarding in Oregon of a CETA 303 (MSFW employment training) grant to a California group brought cries of protest from the Governor and local growers who were convinced that any farmworker organization from California had to have direct ties to the UFW, and consequently feared attempts to unionize MSFWs in Oregon. Only strong public disclaimers of a tie between the two organizations from UFW President Cesar Chavez and the Director of the California farmworker organization quieted these fears.
76. *Time, op. cit.*
77. President's Reorganization Project, "Migrant Transfer Options," (Washington, D.C., July, 1978). p. 1.
78. Rainier National Bank, *op. cit.*, pp. 677
79. Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
80. A call for coordination of MSFW organizations or a MSFW office in the federal government was presented in the reports of the Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.;* HEW *HEW Policy, op, cit.;* Rural America, *op. cit.;* InterAmerica, *An Assessment, op. cit.;* InterAmerica, *Child Welfare, op. cit.;* and InterAmerica, *An Evaluation, op. cit.*
81. President's Reorganization Project, *op. cit.*

82. Rural America, et. al., "A Position Paper on Migrant Options as Proposed by the President's Reorganization Project," contained in a letter to President Jimmy Carter (Washington, D.C.), November, 1978.
83. Ernest G. Green, "Statement of Ernest G. Green, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training, Before the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.), July 21, 1977, p. 1.
84. Activities of the Employment Standards Administration, DOL in Region X include: coordination of a Federal Regional Council Work Group composed of high level federal officials from five agencies to devise an action-oriented Work Plan to address the problems of MSFWs in the Region, publication of a nationally distributed quarterly newsletter on MSFW activities in the Region, coordination of community meetings to inform MSFW about federal government programs and services, and other activities.
85. Work Group on Issues of Concern to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers and Other Urban/-Rural Hispanics, "Report to the Federal Regional Council, A Work Plan to Address the Problems of MSFWs" (Seattle, Washington), March 6, 1979, p. 2.
86. Task Panel on MSFWs, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
87. HEW, *HEW Policy, op. cit.*, p. 5.

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